

**Summary Note of the Bee Health Advisory Forum
7th Meeting - 26 November 2013
Room 52F23, Fera, Sand Hutton, York**

Present:

Helen Crews (Chair)	Food & Environment Research Agency (Fera)
Mike McGuinness	
Kelvin Hughes	
Mike Brown	
Richard Watkins	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra)
Marie Holmes	
David Aston	British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA)
Tim Lovett	
Margaret Ginman	Bee Farmers' Association (BFA)
John Mellis	
Chris Hartfield ☎	National Farmers' Union (NFU)
Dinah Sweet	Welsh Beekeepers' Association (WBKA)
Bob Smith	National Diploma in Beekeeping (NDB)
Nick Renn	Veterinary Medicines Directorate

Apologies:

Ken Edwards	Husbandry Adviser
Andy Wattam	Fera
Steve Sunderland	Scottish Government
Wally Shaw	WBKA
Jane Jones	Welsh Government
Amy Byrne	

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed attendees to the 7th meeting of the BHAF including an extended welcome to Nick Renn of Veterinary Medicines Directorate who was attending to discuss medicines. Mike McGuinness Inspectorates Programme Co-ordinator (Fera) who would be discussing the business case and Kelvin Hughes Head of Inspectorates (Fera) who was attending to see how NBU work fitted in with the work of the BHAF.

2. Minutes of last meeting

The Group was asked whether they had any comments on the draft notes from the 6th BHAF meeting. The following points were raised:

Alter 'filed' typo on page 2 and change 'would' to 'might' to change emphasis on page 4.

Update on actions:

1 – Complete.

2 – Discussed (see below on breakdown of spend)

3 to 9 – Complete.

10 – Richard Watkins had approached authors on the ‘Understanding Honey Bee Stakeholders’ report but unfortunately they were unable to share at present due to it still being under review. As soon as this was ready it would be circulated to the Forum.

11- Complete.

12 – Complete. Stakeholders had met several times and produced a combined funding proposal which was discussed in greater detail at agenda item 5.

13 –It was expressed that the actions captured at the last meeting on indicators were incomplete and a request was made to revisit the indicators at the next meeting. The BFA offered a document which they had collated after the 6th meeting which may help inform the next meeting.

Disappointment was expressed that there wasn’t more information available on HBP breakdown of spend. The Chair would seek clearance from the Fera Finance Director and if approval was granted to share this would be circulated prior to the next meeting and added to the agenda for discussion.

ACTION 1: John Mellis to send Marie the BFA recording of the indicator discussion from 6th meeting for circulation to BHAF.

It was noted that indicators needed to take into account that measures shouldn’t be burdensome yet should be meaningful and practical. It was agreed to have another item agenda on this at the 8th meeting.

3. Highlight report – including addition of any new risks

The Chair invited comments on the report which had been circulated prior to the meeting.

The Forum was content with the report and pleased to see that the National Pollinator Strategy was recorded as a risk (7). Further discussion on this was suggested at agenda item 8.

Dependency 2: Sub-group working was costing stakeholder’s money and it was queried whether there were any ways to support this work. The Chair noted the concern and offered to look into whether this would be possible but stressed that other groups, such as plant health groups, didn’t receive expenses of any sort. It was suggested that help could also be supplied by way of free teleconference facilities and meeting rooms.

ACTION 2: Chair to seek guidance on possibility of financially supporting sub-group working or how to mitigate the problem by extending existing meetings/ providing free teleconference facilities.

4. Update on progress with Implementation Plan

Mike Brown updated the Forum with progress on development of the Implementation Plan. The basis that formed the draft was taken from the consultation recommendations. Mike responded with what the NBU was doing to achieve that recommendation, what was proposed, by whom, timescale and risks. He stressed this was a shared plan for all around the table to input into and deliver.

Mike had met with David Aston on 25/11/13 where they went through the Plan in detail. David was working on the Plan with further thoughts and would coordinate any changes with Mike. A brief run through was provided on what they had noted during the meeting such as;

- Raising beekeepers awareness
- Improvements to BeeBase navigation
- Working together to get an accurate number of beekeepers and colonies
- Live material for demonstrations
- NBU would prefer to participate in larger events jointly for more effective training
- Whether we should be recommending destruction rather than cure of weak colonies and tackling ill health swiftly through this method rather than wait for colonies to show ill health
- Feed in IPI research projects outcomes
- Highlight DASH scheme in document
- Make sure when developing protocols that they are circulated to BHAF and shared when fully developed
- Lots of discussion on varroa management and the need for further work/detail on exotic threats and best practice for varroa
- Look at health overall: nutrition, etc.
- Make sure national associations are kept up to date with contingency exercises in the field, work together to spread the word.

David congratulated Mike on developing the document to where it was which was echoed by the Forum.

It was urged for the Forum to look at the Implementation Plan in its entirety where the shift in emphasis would become more apparent and how the Plan balanced the need to maintain a level of activity whilst allowing for exotic threats.

A query was raised to what extent were stakeholders able to consult within their associations. It was permitted to discuss with relevant colleagues i.e. education committee and the focal contact point would be the BHAF representative. As this was a working draft it was asked to avoid widespread distribution to the extended memberships, this would be explicitly explained in a header to that effect.

ACTION 3: Mike Brown to add confidentiality statement to headers and circulate document to BHAF.

ACTION 4: All - Feedback to Mike Brown on the document before Christmas.

ACTION 5: Richard Watkins to arrange Policy Network with Devolved Administration's to feed into Implementation Plan.

ACTION 6: Mike Brown to convene small delivery group during January to pull all comments together and present results to wider BHAF at the 8th meeting.

5. Business case planning for funding beyond 2015 – stakeholder option

The Chair outlined that Tim Adey had advised he would require a brief business case before Christmas and the stronger this was could potentially avoid a lengthy business case in spring. It was hoped Tim could advise on improvements to the initial business case to avoid the need for a full case. The Chair suggested including a benefits map to visually show how the HBP had evolved over the last 5 years.

ACTION 7: Helen Crews, Richard Watkins, Mike McGuinness and Marie Holmes to meet to develop benefits map.

The Chair introduced Mike McGuinness who would be drafting the business case. Mike presented an outline of what he had prepared to date. This included background on the 3 main NBU funding sources and relevant information from the 2009 [National Audit Office report](#) in addition to consulting with key members of the team. Mike welcomed any comments to support what was already drafted.

It was mentioned that Defra preferred to see at least 3 options presented and would welcome a 4th option from stakeholders. The below outlined the funding request for each option. (note: these aren't ranked in order of preference/priority).

Option 1 – level funding (current £579k) plus £130k to fund shortfall from loss of Apiculture Programme funding totalling **£709k**;

Option 2 – maintain level funding (**£579k**);

Option 3 - 30% reduction in line with predicted cuts to Defra of 30% (**£405k**);

Option 4 – level funding (£579k) + Apiculture shortfall (£130k) + stakeholder joint ventures (£23k) totalling **£732k**.

The summary would outline the preferred choice of the above 4 options. It was possible to include annexes and the combined stakeholder budget proposal for option 4 would be included as an annex.

The following questions were raised during discussions:

Q – Where did the R&D budget sit? The evidence team held the budget for R&D. The HBP was considered delivery.

Q – Was disease regulation less effective before the HBP? The NAO report described in terms of statutory responsibilities there were insufficient resources for the NBU to deliver its work. The HBP was an injection of funds for SBI's which included training, covering greater surveillance, carrying out the RAS survey and policy review. Since the start of the Plan in 2009 there were considerably more beekeepers and bigger threats such as Asian hornet and managing EFB. The implementation plan was looking at using resources in different ways. RAS showed a risk-based approach to inspections was better than random, and it was

hoped that an IPI project '[Modelling systems for managing bee disease: the epidemiology of European foulbrood](#)' would illustrate whether there were different ways of conducting risk based inspections.

Q - Was there a case for a repeat RAS which may provide a statistically valid measure of increase in trends covered above? It was felt not as the survey was very thorough and it wouldn't bring any new information to repeat so soon, perhaps in 10 years it would be worth repeating.

Q Was the situation today better or worse in terms of notifiable pests/diseases? 35,000+ colonies were inspected last year and the NBU were detecting more disease organisms in colonies rather than clinical infection. However, EFB was still widespread and difficult to deal with. It was observed that between 4,000 and 5,000 new beekeepers were signing up to BeeBase each year, many of which were in existing 'at risk' areas which posed a bigger threat. IAPV was confirmed in the UK and it wasn't clear what the level of threat of this was yet.

Q – Could husbandry techniques be linked to EFB spread? Yes, steps to address this were included in the Implementation Plan.

It was suggested that the NBU should stop hive-side training which would in turn reduce costs. If this training were to be reduced it should be carried out by associations and work in parallel. The Implementation Plan included a change in focus on risk based inspections and would continue to provide advice but wouldn't carry on with the 500+ training events they were previously doing.

Bob Smith presented a stakeholder budget proposal which was the combined efforts of NDB, BFA and BBKA who had met to discuss what could be presented under option 4. It was recognised we were halfway through HBP and the basis for the proposal took a view on where stakeholders would like to be at the end of the Plan. As a result the proposal was a combined effort on a 5 year plan. The proposal focussed on 7 themes which stakeholders would like to be proactive in. These themes were:

1. **Raise the game** - A sustainable population of honey bees required husbandry skills that are beyond that taught in basic courses. These actions were required to support improvers and raise the level of bee husbandry;
2. **Bee health consultation implementation** - The 2013 Consultation on Bee Health resulted in recommendations to be implemented, including an increased focus on root causes of health problems and a transition towards a more self-reliant health-control sector, with a lighter Regulatory touch;
3. **Better control of varroa** - Varroa destructor remained a key issue in maintenance of healthy bee stocks, more than 20 years after its arrival in the UK. Further attention to this key parasite was a pre-requisite to a sustainable population of honey bees. Identified in Bee Health Consultation as a priority area;
4. **Locally adapted queens** - Importation of queens from the southern hemisphere and from Europe was a contentious issue as these non-native races were thought to be poorly adapted to UK climate conditions. International trade in bees was also a significant risk factor in pest and disease introductions. This proposal sought to trial

a system of producing early season queens of selected, UK-derived genetic stock. This would reduce the numbers of non-UK origin packages and nucleus being imported;

5. **Beekeeper and apiary registration** - Current voluntary systems of beekeeper and apiary registration were incomplete which hindered both disease control and the identification of training need. 2013 Bee Health Consultation signalled a majority of stakeholders in favour of Registration;
6. **Beekeeping as a career** - Projections were that the UK area of crops requiring insect pollination would continue to grow. There were concerns that the age distribution amongst bee-farmers meant that current pollination fulfilment was at risk; the industry urgently required a younger demographic. Several measures were proposed to facilitate the entry of younger bee farmers and to recruit early retirees (e.g. Armed Forces personnel);
7. **Food for bees means pollination** - There was a symbiotic relationship between honey bees foraging for nectar and pollen for their food, and the vital pollination service they provide. Honey bees remain the most easily managed bees for pollination. Recognition of this vital role would play an important part in supporting viable stocks of honey bees, for pollination.

The Chair thanked all stakeholders who met and for producing the helpful document.

A suggestion was made to strengthen the 4th option to make it clear that funding allocated to stakeholders would be match-funded, this would also show that stakeholders were engaged and involved with the Plan.

6. Sign off of stakeholder option

The Chair outlined that this session was about developing a clear idea for option 4 and seeking clarity on proposals.

It was agreed that Mike McGuinness would draft option 4 to include comments and input from the stakeholder budget proposal. Feedback was required from the Forum on what was produced so far including the option 4 draft yet to be developed. A suggestion was made to include an explanation why elements were important such as the RAS to allow greater understanding. In addition to highlighting match-funding and working group synergies.

It was asked as part of the exercise for stakeholders to prioritise their proposals, if agreement couldn't be met over the priorities it would require noting for the submission. A prioritisation exercise hadn't yet been carried out but it was suggested that HBP should be bidding for extra money and this was an ideal time to do so due to the National Pollinator Strategy. The rounded option would be what stakeholders had asked for and what NBU needed to deliver the plan.

ACTION 8: Mike McGuinness to draft option 4 to include stakeholder bid presented at the meeting, Mike to circulate on Monday 2nd December for comment from Group by Friday 6th December.

ACTION 9: BFA, BBKA & NDB to prioritise funding proposals submitted.

7. VMD update on progress with medicines

Nick Renn of VMD presented an update on bee medicines, main points included:

- General points of law
- VMD action plan update on the availability of medicines for bees
- Update on progress with communications, engaging with manufacturers, reduced data requirements and lobbying in Europe
- Update: on medicines for bees MAs in 2013 – including vet cascade scheme
- Research and codex
- Future work including review the status of 'hive cleaner' products and how these should be authorised
- Review of EU legislation on veterinary medicines

The following points were raised during discussions:

It was felt that the impact from adverts of hive cleaners in magazines was becoming a problem. The message had changed over recent years and more was asked of VMD now to take action where previously it was felt it was useful to have something rather than nothing. During that period VMD had a light touch approach and instructed firms not to claim to treat disease. It was felt that statements were becoming bolder. The VMD were aware and such adverts were being dealt with by their enforcement team.

There was a discussion on the reluctance to remove unauthorised products completely in case it caused issues with bee health and a positive was that beekeepers may be monitoring more regularly when using such products. However, beekeepers could also be misled into thinking the products were eradicating varroa etc.

The Chair summed up that when new rules were introduced by VMD, BHAF members should be active in helping spread the message.

8. Update on progress with National Pollinator Strategy (NPS)

Richard updated the group on progress with the NPS which included a description of the work undertaken over summer to corral the science and current health status of our pollinators and pollination service. Subsequent to that a workshop was held on 24th October where stakeholders convened to help inform the Strategy. At the workshop a list of activities was identified and work started on prioritisation which covered a whole range of policy areas such as; planning, CAP, medicines etc. A series of subgroups were set up and work was continuing.

The first iteration of draft Strategy went before the programme board on 27th November, this would then be circulated to the BHAF w/c 2/12/13 for urgent comment. Wider circulation of the document in its draft stage was prohibited but could be shared with relevant members of associations for advice.

9. Lessons learned on informing honey bee health consultation

Marie requested feedback from members with their thoughts on how the improving honey bee health consultation went from a stakeholder perspective. As time was short Marie would send an electronic template for members to complete. There were sections on what went well/badly etc. and all feedback would be very helpful and appreciated to help inform future consultations.

ACTION 10: All - send feedback to Marie Holmes by CoP Monday 9th December.

10. AOB

Issues log – further discussion on the issues log would be included in the next meeting. The BFA were asked to consider the top 3 risks to include in the log.

The next meeting would include discussion on R&D, indicators and an update from Kate Parker on progress with BeeBase. Potential date of the next meeting would be circulated by doodle-poll and was anticipated to be held late January/early February 2014.

Table of actions

Action Number	Action	Person(s) responsible
1	Send Marie the BFA recording of the indicator discussion from 6 th meeting for circulation to BHAF.	John Mellis
2	Seek guidance on possibility of financially supporting sub-group working or how to mitigate the problem by extending existing meetings/ providing free teleconference facilities.	Chair
3	Add confidentiality statement to headers and circulate document to BHAF.	Mike Brown
4	Feedback to Mike Brown on the Implementation Plan before Christmas.	All
5	Arrange Policy Network with Devolved Administration's to feed into Implementation Plan.	Richard Watkins
6	Convene small delivery group during January to pull all comments together and present results to wider BHAF at the 8 th meeting.	Mike Brown
7	Develop benefits map for inclusion in business case.	Chair, Richard Watkins, Mike McGuinness & Marie Holmes
8	Draft option 4 to include stakeholder bid presented at the meeting, Mike to circulate on Monday 2 nd December for comment from Group by Friday 6 th December.	Mike McGuinness & All
9	Prioritise funding proposals submitted.	Bob Smith, David Aston & Margaret Ginman
10	Send feedback for lessons learned report to Marie Holmes by CoP Monday 9 th December.	All